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ABSTRACT

The principal objective of this research was to analyze the question of the kinds or types of teachers who have the most influence on students' aspirations and achievements. The study included a sample of students from 4 high schools in which Indian and non-Indian students were enrolled. A questionnaire was administered to and analyzed for 451 respondents. Students indicated that English more than non-English teachers had had a strong influence on their educational aspirations and expectations. Of all students who identified English teachers as persons with whom they had discussed their educational plans, 47% were Indian and 40% were non-Indian. The author concluded from this analysis that English teachers are more likely than other teachers to have discussed educational plans with students. It was further concluded that those Indian students who contacted English teachers appeared to be least academically oriented, or conversely, were more likely candidates for drop-out status. It was suggested that future research on this question should be undertaken with designs which separate the effects of teachers' characteristics from the effects of student-teacher interaction and the content of the subjects taught. (HBC)

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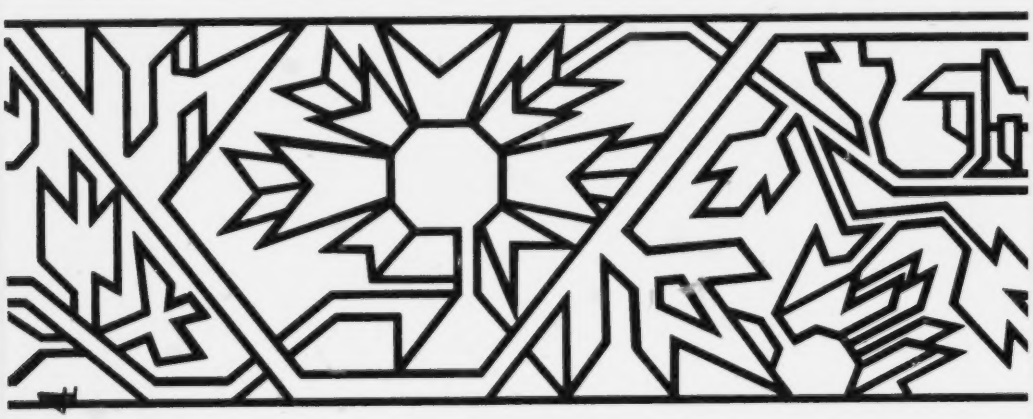

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Montana State University, Bozeman

Discussion of Educational Plans With Teachers by Indian and Non-Indian High School Students and Type of Subject Taught by Teachers

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INTRODUCTION

A research objective which has not been the subject of frequent investigation is the question of th *kinds* or *types* of teachers who have the most influence on students' aspirations and achievements. Teachers are usually classified as members of homogeneous groups, and the possibility of explaining differences in student-teacher relationships by variation in the subjects that teachers teach has not been systematically explored.[1]

The principal objective of the research is to present an analysis of a research question which evolved from the author's previous work in the area of educational decision making.

One of the comments that students in several states made while being interviewed was that English teachers more than non-English teachers had a strong influence on their educational aspirations and ex-

[1] There are many studies of the influence of teachers on educational and occupational aspirations and performances of students. See some of the following publications: C. Norman Alexander and E. Q. Campbell, "Peer Influences on Adolescent Aspirations and Attainments," "*American Sociological Review*, 29 (August, 1964), 568-575; David J. Bordua, "Educational Aspirations and Parental Stress on College," *Social Forces*, 38 (March, 1960), 262-269; Robert A. Ellis and W. Clayton Lane, "Structural Support for Upward Mobility," *American Sociological Review*, 28 (October, 1963), 743-756; A. O. Haller and W. H. Sewell, "Occupational Choices of Wisconsin Farm Boys," *Rural Sociology*, 32 (March, 1967), 37-55; A. O. Haller and C. E. Butterworth, "Peer Influences on Levels of Occupational and Educational Aspirations," *Social Forces*, 38 (May, 1960), 289-295; Robert E. Herriott, "Some Social Determinants of Educational Aspirations," *Harvard Educational Review*, 33 (Spring, 1963), 155-177; Wayne L. Larson and Walter L. Slocum, "The Impact of Poverty on Rural Youth: An Analysis of the Relationship Between Family Income and Education, Self-Concept, Performance and Values of Rural High School Students," Washington Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No. 714, 1969; H. F. Lionberger, Cecil L. Gregory, H. C. Chang, "Occupational and College Choices of Farm and Non-farm Male High School Seniors in Missouri," (A Preliminary Report) University of Missouri, Department of Sociology, December, 1965. The study which is most directly related to the objectives of this paper are presented in the study by Ellis and Lane.

pectations.[2] However, the recording of students' comments did not permit the researcher to draw conclusions about the relationships between teachers and students which accounted for some degree of influence. Therefore, the author included a question about teacher influence in two studies conducted in the State of Montana. The questions were designed to obtain information on the subject(s) teachers taught, and ways in which teachers might influence students' perceptions of their personal abilities in the general area of educational achievement. A secondary objective was to investigate the presence or absence of biases or prejudices of teachers as perceived by students, particularly students from low-income families and/or minority groups. Findings from the first of those studies are reported here.

One of the difficulties associated with answering the research question is the problem of developing research designs that allow the researcher to make reliable and valid conclusions concerning differential influence. For example should we consider reports about student-teacher relationships from teachers more reliable than the reports of students? Or, can objective observers be trained to distinguish influential teachers from those who are not influential in school situations?[3] It is also quite possible that teachers may not intend to influence students, but students may perceive the actions of teachers as instances of such behavior. Furthermore, other important questions cannot be answered from analyses of the reliability of observations in questionnaires or interviews; the critical questions are which kind of observation of student-teacher relationships helps to explain aspirations and achievements of students while enrolled in high school, and after they have completed high school. It is, therefore, not simply a question of methodological considerations, but also an issue of substantive import, e.g., what difference does the student-teacher relationship make on student performance and aspirations.[4]

This discussion highlights some of the difficulties of providing conclusive answers to the question of teacher influence. It also provides a framework for interpreting and evaluating the results reported in this paper.

The study included a sample of students from four high schools in which Indian and non-Indian students were enrolled. A questionnaire was administered to all students in attendance. Four hundred fifty-one usable questionnaires were analyzed. One hundred three non-Indian students and 45 Indian students indi-

[2] Similar findings were reported from interviews in the states of Washington and Missouri. In addition, probing into the types of influence on college students' and colleagues' educational and occupational aspirations revealed similar results.

[3] Influence in this discussion would include the impact of the teacher on student decisions which go beyond the formal obligations of the teacher to influence the student in performance of assignments, and promotion to higher grades. It would also include influence on future choices in educational and occupational roles.

[4] In this instance the concern is with different ways of obtaining observations about teacher-student relationships, e.g., participant observation, questionnaires, interviews, video tape recordings, etc., but also with different situations in which students and teachers interact, e.g., classroom, outside of the classroom but in the school situation, and settings outside the school.

cated they had discussed their educational plans with teachers in the year prior to administration of the questionnaire. Respondents were classified as English or non-English students according to whether a teacher with whom they had discussed their educational plans taught, or did not teach English in their high school.[5] There were 62 non-Indian and 24 Indian students in the non-English group.

In addition to questions about teachers' relations with students and presence or absence of contact, several questions about students' friends were included to provide a broader profile of those who "go to" English and non-English teachers. The differences will be presented for Indian and non-Indian students separately in order to illustrate differences in the profile of students in the two ethnic groups.

FINDINGS

Of all students who identified English teachers as persons with whom they had discussed their educational plans, 47 percent were Indian and 40 percent were non-Indian. This is a higher proportion than would be expected if one were dividing up students' responses by possible choices of teachers.[6] Even though students usually are required to take four years of English, the total exposure to English teachers by students as compared with exposure to *all* other teachers is certainly much less. However, one might suspect that the higher proportion who listed English teachers as contacts is a result of second and third exposures. This contention is questionable since other subjects, e.g., history, are taught to the same students more than once.[7]

The author concluded from this analysis that English teachers are more likely than other teachers to have discussed educational plans with students.[8] In order to determine the reasons for the disproportionate "contact" with English teachers, an analysis of students' responses to the questions mentioned above was undertaken. The findings from these responses are presented in Table 1.

There are several differences between groups of students which can be summarized. When Indian students who contacted English teachers are compared with those who did not do so, the data in Table 1 indicates that Indian students who contacted English teachers were *more likely* to have indicated that:

[5] Students listed the name of the subject the teacher taught. The author then divided the students who had discussed plans with a teacher into two groups, those who had contacted English teachers and those who contacted other teachers. No consideration was given to responsibility for initiating the contact, that is, student or teacher.

[6] I assume that there is a slightly greater chance that students will be exposed to English teachers than any other kind of teacher. For example, assuming that 30 percent of student-teacher contacts are contacts with English teachers, the finding that 40 percent of non-Indian contacts and 47 percent Indian student contacts were with English teachers would occur substantively by chance less than five times out of a hundred.

[7] In some cases, athletic coaches were teaching P.E. and history, for example. In the second study, 42 percent of the students contacted English teachers; the next highest proportion was reported for business-commercial and mathematics, 10 percent.

[8] The interpretation and conclusions are based on the assumption that there is differential selection for discussion of educational plans by identity of teachers.

Table 1. Student responses to selected questions about teachers in their high school and their close friends by ethnicity and identity of teachers contacted about educational plans, and percentage differences between responses of Indian, and non-Indian students.

	INDIAN		NON-INDIAN			
	English Percent	Non-English Percent	English Percent	Non-English Percent	Percentage difference for Indian students	Percentage difference for Non-Indian students
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1. They were *very sure* or *sure* that all teachers liked them.	22	8	3	9	+14[a]	−6
2. Teachers understood their feelings very or pretty well.	47	32	70	73	+15	−3
3. Teachers *never* said anything to make them angry.	53	16	13	29	+37	−16
4. Teachers had given them the idea that they *were not* good enough to finish two years of college.	22	18	18	15	+4	+3
5. Teachers had given them the idea that they *were not* good enough to finish four years of college.	39	23	14	15	+16	−1
6. Most teachers *would be surprised* if they finished high school.	31	22	9	2	+9	+7
7. *Most* teachers *would be surprised* if they finished four years of college.	75	46	50	25	+29	+25
8. Teachers had given them the idea that they *were good enough* students to finish two years of college.	67	52	66	76	+15	−10
9. Teachers *had an influence* on their future educational plans.	79	47	67	59	+32	+8
10. No one had *helped* them decide on their educational plans.	46	14	9	12	+32	−3
11. *All* or *most* teachers treated them fairly.	29	48	38	44	−19	−6
12. *All* or *most* of their friends would quit high school if they could find a way to do it without getting into an unpleasant situation.	40	46	46	53	−6	−7
13. *All* or *most* of their friends were active in academic activities in high school.	16	46	41	53	−30	−12
14. *Few* to *none* of their friends get into trouble in high school.	47	71	87	76	−24	+11

[a]Percentage differences reported in columns five and six were always calculated by subtracting percent Non-English from percent English.

1. they were *very sure* or *sure* that all teachers liked them.
2. teachers understood their feelings *very* or *pretty* well.
3. teachers *never* say anything to make them angry.
4. teachers had given them the idea that they *were not* good enough to finish *two* years of college.
5. teachers had given them the idea that they *were not* good enough to finish *four* years of college.
6. most teachers would be surprised if they *finished high school.*
7. most teachers would be surprised if they *finished four years* of college.
8. teachers had given them the idea that they *were* good enough to finish two years of college.[9]
9. teachers had an influence on their future educational plans.
10. no one had helped them decide on a job after finishing their schooling.

On the other hand, those Indian students who contacted English teachers were less likely to have indicated that:

11. *all* or *most* teachers treated them fairly.
12. *all* or *most* of their friends would quit school if they could find a way to do it without getting into an unpleasant situation.
13. *all* or *most* of their friends were active in academic activities in high school.
14. *few* or *none* of their friends get in trouble in high school.

In summary, Indian students who contacted English teachers have "better" relations with teachers according to findings 1, 2 and 3, but the responses about fairness of teachers (finding number 11) is an exception to the inference of "better" relations. Finally, those Indian students who contacted English teachers appear to be least academically oriented, or conversely, are more likely candidates for drop-out status.

An examination of non-Indian students' response patterns to the same questions reveals that the percentage differences are in the opposite direction, i.e. less likely rather than more likely, on findings numbered 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, and 10, but more likely rather than less likely on number 14.

A comparison of differences between Indian and non-Indian students, ignoring differences by type of teacher contacted, suggests that there is variation by ethnicity. Indian students were more likely to indicate that teachers did not understand

[9] The apparent discrepancy between items number (4) and (8) probably result from the nature of the question asked rather than invalid reporting by students. Two years of college is a rather ambiguous phrase. It can be taken to mean 2 years of college in a university, 2 years in a junior or community college or 2 years of training in school which are frequently called vocational college, beauty college, business college. Therefore, the student would not be in a position (in a study utilizing questionnaires) to differentiate between the possible types of training in 2 years of college.

their feelings, but those Indian students who contacted English teachers were more likely to report they were sure that all teachers liked them and that teachers never said anything to make them angry (the highest percentage difference reported in Table 1: 37 percent), and those Indian students who contacted English teachers are more likely to be labeled potential dropouts (findings numbered 12, 13 and 14).

DISCUSSION

The question which remains to be answered is: Why are there differences between students according to identity of subject matter taught by those teachers who were contacted for discussion about their educational plans?[10] In order to provide some insight on this question, an examination of the background characteristics of students in the two groups, English and non-English, was undertaken. Data on student reports of family income, and level of fathers' educational achievement are reported in Tables 2 and 3 for Indian and non-Indian students.[11]

An examination of the low income and low education column suggests it is only in these categories that English teachers are more likely to be contacted than non-English teachers. The differences by income can be accounted for by examining a breakdown of the data by income groups for Indian and non-Indian male students in Table 4.

In this table, 83 percent of Indian males in the low income category contacted English teachers as opposed to 17 percent who contacted non-English teachers. An analysis of the distribution by sex and fathers' level of educational achievement did not systematically affect the original distributions in Tables 2 and 3. However, the highest proportion of respondents in the English group were located in the low income category for both Indian and non-Indian females. Thus, the findings from Tables 2, 3 and 4 suggest that English teachers are more likely to be contacted by Indian students (particularly male students) who come from families with low levels of income in which the head of the family has relatively lower levels of educational achievement.[12] An interpretation and discussion of these findings follows.

[10] Students' reports about teachers are taken as partial indication of the extent to which teachers serve as significant others who influence students' educational aspirations and performance.

[11] Family income was measured by asking students to rank their family from high to low on wealth and income in one question, and to rate the general financial condition of their family in a second question. Response to these two questions were used to develop a single rank for each student's family on level of income.

[12] These findings are consistent with Ellis and Lane. They reported in the article cited in footnote number 1 that "though girls are somewhat more likely than boys to mention the importance of non-familial influences, for both sexes it is the student from the lower social background who reports the greatest number of non-familial influences. . . Of the non-familial influences, the high school teacher turns out to be the most significant, especially in the lower strata," p. 750 and 754. These findings held for persons cited as important sources of influence, and for persons cited as most important sources of influence. A colleague hypothesized that English teachers may identify more strongly with less acculturated Indians than non-English teachers, thus, the reason for the findings in Table 4. This assumes that low-income Indian students are less acculturated than high-income Indian students.

TABLE 2. Proportion of Indian and non-Indian students in English and non-English groups by level of family income as perceived by students.[a]

Identity of teachers contacted	FAMILY INCOME Low #	Low %	Average #	Average %	High #	High %	Total #	Total %
INDIAN								
English	11	52	6	43	3	38	20	47
Non-English	10	48	8	57	5	62	23	53
Total	21	100	14	100	8	100	43	100
NON-INDIAN								
English	10	40	16	36	13	42	39	39
Non-English	15	60	29	64	18	58	62	61
Total	25	100	45	100	31	100	101	100

[a] See footnote number 11 for description of questions used to develop measures of family income.

TABLE 3. Proportion of Indian and non-Indian students in English and non-English groups by fathers' level of educational achievement as reported by students.

Identity of teachers contacted	FATHERS' EDUCATION Low[a] #	Low[a] %	Average[b] #	Average[b] %	High[c] #	High[c] %	Total #	Total %
INDIAN								
English	6	50	7	44	4	44	17	46
Non-English	6	50	9	56	5	56	20	54
Total	12	100	16	100	9	100	37	100
NON-INDIAN								
English	19	44	11	32	9	39	39	39
Non-English	24	56	23	68	14	61	61	61
Total	43	100	34	100	23	100	100	100

[a] Low educational achievement means that father had less than a high school degree.

[b] Average educational achievement means that father completed high school.

[c] High educational achievement means that father completed some college training, or a 4-year college education.

A recent article on teachers of disadvantaged students contained a discussion on the profile of the successful teacher of "disadvantaged" students.[13] According to the author of this article, the successful teacher of "disadvantaged" students treats students as individuals with varying and latent abilities. He is respectful of students and sets standards which they can achieve. He is honest, i.e., he does not stereotype students nor sentimentalize about them. The findings presented above do not reflect

[13] Miriam L. Goldberg, "Adapting Teacher Style to Pupil Differences: Teachers For Disadvantaged Children," *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 10 (1964), 161-178.

TABLE 4. Proportion of Indian and Non-Indian male students in English and non-English groups by level of family income.

Identity of teachers contacted	FAMILY INCOME Low #	Low %	Average #	Average %	High #	High %	Total #	Total %
INDIAN MALE								
English	5	83	5	63	0	0	10	62
Non-English	1	17	3	37	2	100	6	38
Total	6	100	8	100	2	100	16	100
NON-INDIAN MALE								
English	4	29	10	40	8	50	22	40
Non-English	10	71	15	60	8	50	33	60
Total	14	100	25	100	16	100	55	100

directly on the author's discussion, but the data suggest that those students who discuss their educational plans with English teachers "get realistic assessments" of their ability to complete future educational goals.[14] That is, they would be surprised if *some* Indian students finished high school (31 percent of the Indian students in the English group, 22 percent in the non-English group, indicated that teachers would be surprised if they finished high school). The questions about students' perceptions of whether teachers liked them, understood their feelings, or said anything to make them angry, suggest that "better" relations exist between Indian students and teachers for those students who had discussed their plans with English teachers. Therefore, they may have "better" relations for the reasons mentioned above in the discussion of the successful teacher of "disadvantaged" students.

This speculative inference would most likely hold for Indian students with low family income who are children of fathers with relatively lower levels of educational achievement. The perception of unfairness of teachers may result from honest attempts of teachers in suggesting the student's relative inability to achieve specified levels of educational achievement, especially high levels considered desirable goals in the dominant non-Indian culture. An alternative interpretation is that English teachers are more prejudiced toward Indian students and therefore do not rate abilities of Indian students to complete high school and post high school education as highly as they do non-Indian students; the unfairness of teachers reported may also reflect

[14] The phrase "get realistic assessments" means that teachers who use past performance records as indicators of probable future performance of the average Indian and non-Indian students would most likely predict higher educational achievement for non-Indian students, and possibly those expectations are reflected in their relations with Indian students. It should be noted that the performance patterns of Indian students in the state in which this study was conducted are changing. A greater proportion of Indian students are completing high school, and enrolling in college. Therefore, there may be a gap in knowledge for some high school teachers which accounts for incorrect labeling of Indian students, and possibly the feelings about unfairness reported in item number 11 in Table 1.

prejudices of the teachers toward Indians. The former interpretation receives the most support from the data.

Written comments to interviewers from Indian students who completed the sentence, "A good teacher is _____," are indicative of the positive forces operating for the postulation of "better" relations between Indian students and some English teachers. One student said, "A good teacher is one who understands the problems of the kids in this school." Another student said, "one who understands the background of the community he teaches in." A third student said, "a person who treats you as an individual and tries to meet your personal educational needs." On the negative side, a student in the same study said, "a good teacher is a dead teacher." Less deadly, and congruent with the alternative interpretation given above, one student said a bad teacher is "one who hates Indians." These comments are consistent with Goldberg's description of the teacher who might be successful in teaching students who are relatively "disadvantaged".[15] The comments in this discussion should not be taken as generalizable evidence that English teachers best fit the profile, that they have "better" relations with Indian students, or conversely that they treat them unfairly, since the sample was not a random sample of students or schools. The findings apply only to the four schools in this study. The four schools are typical rural schools among those schools in which Indian students are enrolled, i.e., they are small in size, located near Indian reservations, and had varying proportions of Indian student enrollment.

The fact that students who contacted English teachers, especially Indian students, were more likely to be considered potential dropouts or low aspirers relative to educational goals as compared with those students who contacted non-English teachers, supports some of the findings about teacher-student relations in studies of students in other minority groups, and students in general. A quote from a study of "resentiment" in secondary schools provides a clue to the reported differences.[16]

> Nothing too good ever really happened to me. But I think I was fortunate to get the 2nd and 3rd year English teachers I did. They really made the class reasonably enjoyable and meaningful. They are among the very few teachers here more interested in having students learn about literature, current events, almost anything, rather than just memorizing a lot of boring, meaningless garbage.

A quote from an Indian student who completed the sentence, "a good teacher is _____," is instructive. He wrote, "A good teacher is one who teaches 'why' of things instead of just telling us what we have to know."

[15] *Op. cit.*, Goldberg

[16] Card Nordstrom, et. al., *Society's Children: A Study of Resentiment in the Secondary School.* New York: Random House, 1967. p. 84.

[17] Marianne Wolman, "Cultural Factors and Creativity," in *The Disadvantaged Learner.* (Ed.) Staten W. Webster, San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1966, pp. 321-327.

Additional insights were suggested by the author of a study of cultural factors and creativity.[17] The author was describing Mexican-American students from low-income families in a public secondary school. Comments about two of the students enrolled in the school are interesting, and provide material for speculative inferences about English teachers. The first quotation is a teacher's statement about a student named Bob: "All except his English teacher consider him an introvert, a worrier."[18] The second quotation is about Don: "His English teacher describes him as cooperative, turning in assignments on time, volunteering for oral reports."[19] The author of this article noted, however, that other teachers considered Don a disciplinary problem. The description of the students in this special remedial class in English indicated that they were disciplinary problems in most classes. The fact that the Indian students who contacted English teachers in this study were more likely to have friends who got into trouble in school, and were less likely to have most of their friends participating in academic activities, provides a rationale for hypothesizing that English teachers have a greater tendency than other teachers to empathize with problem students, or students who have difficulties with subject matter other than English.

In any case it is not entirely clear from the findings whether English teachers are more understanding of the problems of Indian students in school, or whether Indian stustudents have characteristics and adjustment problems which they hold in common with students from lower classes and/or other minority groups. The best guess may be that there is something unique in the subject matter that English teachers teach, and/or that there is a degree of selectivity in the choice of teaching English by college students which makes them more sympathetic to the particular problems of students from lower classes and/or minority students. English teachers are not necessarily more positively biased toward lower class and/or minority students; it may simply be true that the unique combination of subject matter as presented in the classroom, and the subject matter as a medium for personalizing classroom assignments, is appealing to students in those social groupings.[20] Furthermore, item 10 (Table 1) indicated that Indian students who contacted English teachers were more likely to feel that no one helped them with their educational plans. This finding may reflect a degree of independence which makes creative writing in English classes appealing.[21] Thus, the activities in English class are rewarding to these students, and the appeal of English teachers is not necessarily related to personality traits of teachers, or to their middle-class biases; the differential content of the subject taught

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 324

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 325

[20] Bruno Bettelheim once advised teachers to personalize the learning experience for "disadvantaged" children, i.e., to emphasize the notions of ours, us, me, etc., in the learning situation. It may be that writing assignments in English provide more opportunity for personalization.

[21] An alternative interpretation of these findings is that students from families with lower income do not discuss plans with counselors or teachers as frequently as students from families with relatively higher levels of income. See Larson and Slocum, 1969.

which allows some teachers to emphasize creativity, and to personalize the learning experience may be more important whereas other subject matter restricts students to patterned and logical outcomes in assigned activities or memorization of factual materials. It is also quite possible that lower-class students or Indian students in this case do not do well in the science and mathematic courses, and for some students, English assignments are more rewarding. Therefore, English teachers are more likely to be contacted by these students.

The interpretations and evaluations in this section were presented in order to generate hypotheses which could be tested in a broader population of students and teachers so that more definitive conclusion could be made about the relationship between teacher-student contact and the educational aspirations or achievements of students with different social class and ethnic backgrounds.

IMPLICATIONS

If the findings in this study about English teachers and/or the subject of English are given more definitive support in future research, they may suggest a way to reach students who have social backgrounds which are associated with lower levels of educational aspiration and achievement. The literature on educational aspiration and achievement of students from low-income families and/or minority groups suggests that there is a great need for new ways of reaching these students. However, research which is conducted in the future should be undertaken with designs which separate the effects of teachers' characteristics from the effects of student-teacher interaction and the content of the subjects taught.

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